



Diné College

“The Higher Education Institution of the Navajos”

Written Testimony of

George Sandoval
Network Administrator, Diné College

Before

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee
Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space

Wednesday February 27, 2002 2:00 p.m.

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, Diné College thanks you for the opportunity to express its view on S.414 the "National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Digital Network Technology Program Act."

My name is George Sandoval and I work at Diné College. I have been employed since 1996 and now serve as the Network Administrator for Information Services. I am also a former student of the college. I am Navajo and have lived on the Navajo Reservation most of my life. Today I would like to discuss the current technological state of the college. And then I would like to describe the need for additional assistance in order to bridge the Digital Divide that exists between much of the Navajo Reservation, including Diné College, and the world.

Diné College Facts

Navajo Community College was founded in 1968 as the first tribally controlled college in the United States. The college has since changed its name to Diné College and is located on the Navajo Reservation in eight communities. Main campuses are located in Tsaile, AZ and Shiprock, NM. Satellite centers in Arizona are at Chinle, Ganado, Kayenta, Tuba City and Window Rock. Crownpoint is the other center in New Mexico. These community centers have accounted for more than half the student population in recent years.

Diné College focuses on preparing students for transfer to four-year colleges as well as for entry into employment. Developmental studies are offered for students who need further preparation for college-level studies. While awarding mostly Associate Degrees the college has also begun a partnership with ASU and has now graduated several classes with Bachelor of Arts Degrees and two students have achieved their Masters Degrees.

We have just begun to offer distance learning via video conferencing and web applications. We have much more to learn about distance learning in all its various forms.

Presidential Visit

Nearly two years ago, on April 17, 2000, former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, made a historic trip to the Navajo Reservation and Diné College. His visit lasted only a few hours but the preparation took many days. I remember the excitement and anticipation as thousands of people awaited his arrival. The president's message during that time concerned the Digital Divide and his commitment to assisting those in need so that they could have the same opportunities as the rest of the country.

I was lucky enough to witness firsthand as he talked to the students of Lake Valley School via the Internet. The Lake Valley School, along with the Diné College sites at Crownpoint and Window Rock, were the recipients of a two-way satellite system donated by Tachyon, Inc. Our techs, as well as techs and engineers

from Tachyon worked long hours to ensure that the video conference transmission could be as optimal as possible. The work paid off as the conference demonstrated.

Another project that we spent time on and that we thought was just as important was bringing the Access Grid to Diné College Shiprock via the NSF funded Internet 2. This endeavor was only possible with the collaborative effort of the University of New Mexico Albuquerque High Performance Computing Center, the Argonne National Laboratory, the Indian Health Services at Shiprock and the General Services Administration. We succeeded in providing content via the Access Grid to the University of New Mexico, Maui High Performance Computing Center, Boston University, Argonne National Laboratory, and the University of Kentucky. Unfortunately, the funding to sustain this endeavor was not available and so the six T1 circuits and router borrowed from the various participants were removed. The effort had proven that the technology is accessible.

Plan for the Future of Technology at Diné College

In the near future we would like to offer more Distance Learning opportunities via video conferencing and web courses. We also will continue to work with nearby Universities and College in order to share resources and extend accessibility to all students. We have plans to offer web registration and student data via the web. As you know, these options are, and have been, available at other colleges and universities.

Unique or Specialized Programs (our strengths)

Some of our biggest strengths include our Center for Diné Studies and our Diné Teacher Education Program. There is discussion on the possibility of offering these Navajo Language course via two-way video and other means. The partnerships that exist with Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, the University of New Mexico High Performance Computing Center and other schools have proven invaluable.

Grants, Donors, Volunteers

We have been the recipients of various grants funded by governmental agencies. Some of these grants include the Navajo Learning Network, the American Indian Network Information Center, the Information Engineering Technology Program and the Visualization Lab. These grants have been completed and were very beneficial to Diné College.

Our current grants are Title III (funded October 1, 2000 for five years), the Youth Opportunity Grant (funded for five years), and the Microsoft AISTEC grant (managed by New Mexico Highlands University; provides training and software for Tribal Colleges).

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium provides various opportunities for Tribal Colleges. They host an Information Technology conference annually. They have also contributed other services to the college including a Y2K assessment in 1999.

We were very appreciative of donations by the following entities: The Dept. Of Commerce, IBM, Reebok, the Dept. of Agriculture and the International Commerce Institute. These entities provided our students with greater computer access. We were able to give more than 60 students computers for their personal use.

The State of Arizona will provide \$1.75 million per year for 10 years for maintenance, renewal and capital expenses. This is from Transaction Privilege Tax revenues.

Opportunities

There are other endeavors that we continue to pursue such as the partnership with the IHS Consortium. This will allow us more bandwidth to the Internet. Northern Arizona University has offered to relocate one of their underused studios to Diné College. This will include other benefits such as experience and expertise.

from NAU Net which has been operating two-way video conferencing in and around the reservation for many years.

We are now working with the General Services Administration and their ANSWER contract. They will provide us with Project Management and other expertise to solve some of our most daunting tasks.

Problems

Some of the more difficult problems that we face include Faculty Retention, housing (for staff and faculty), infrastructure (electrical, data network, - have both become outdated and are difficult to upgrade, dorms/housing for students should be upgraded, and more office space and classrooms are needed). Some of the programs that are affected by budget cuts are directly student related such as Athletics and Student Clubs.

Conclusion

We are moving at a very fast rate at Diné College by our standards. In the five years that I have been at Diné College we have installed and implemented various technologies funded by various means. However we find that we are yet catching up to other schools that are more advanced technologically and thus have more opportunities. Diné College is working hard to provide our students the same options that many other universities provide. With your help and the continued hard work of staff and faculty, many of these advances can happen. Thank You for the opportunity to testify today.